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Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women
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Summary record of the 1633rd meeting
Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Wednesday, 24 October 2018, at 10 a.m.

Chair: Ms. Leinarte

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The meeting was called to order at 10.10 a.m.

Consideration of reports submitted by States parties under article 18 of the Convention (*continued*)

Seventh periodic report of the Congo (CEDAW/C/COG/7; CEDAW/C/COG/Q/7 and CEDAW/C/COG/Q/Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chair, the delegation of the Congo took places at the Committee table.*

2. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo), introducing the seventh periodic report of the Congo (CEDAW/C/COG/7), said that, since the institution of the new Republic following the 25 October 2015 referendum, steps had been taken to boost women's participation in political and public life. The principle of equal access to political, elected and administrative functions had been enshrined in the new Constitution, which also provided for the creation of a Women's Advisory Council tasked with advising the President and the Government on women's issues and women's inclusion in development. According to the implementing legislation the Council's membership was to be exclusively female. A national programme for the period from 2017 to 2021, on women's leadership in political and public life, had been developed by her own ministry, the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development, with the support of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The proportion of women in ministerial positions, the Senate and the National Assembly had increased, as had women's share of seats on departmental and municipal councils.

3. Equal access to education and training was guaranteed under the Constitution, which also stipulated that schooling was compulsory up to the age of 16. To address the problem of discrimination against girls at school, an inclusive education policy had been developed for the period from 2015 to 2025; furthermore, a national strategy to ensure girls' enrolment in school and correct the disparity between girls and boys at all levels of education had been developed in partnership with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF). The National Educational Research and Teaching Institute had published a module on gender equality that would be incorporated into school curricula in the following school year.

4. In the area of health, implementation of the 2014 strategic framework to combat HIV/AIDS and sexually transmitted infections was continuing, with the notable addition of a special programme on mother-to-child transmission. To combat discrimination and stigmatization, legislation had been introduced in 2011 to protect the rights of persons living with HIV; the associated regulations were in the pipeline. With the support of various partners, her ministry was busy implementing the 2017–2021 plan of action to improve the protection of the rights of women living with HIV/AIDS.

5. The Ministry of Health and Population had recently launched an extensive campaign to raise women's awareness of breast and cervical cancer and encourage them to seek diagnostic screening. The three screening centres that had been set up as part of the campaign received some 50 female visitors a day. Those who tested positive were eligible for free treatment consisting of medication provided by the Roche pharmaceutical company and subsidized by the Government.

6. As to the protection of women's rights, she said that the overhaul of the relevant legislative codes launched some years previously with the support of the European Union had reinforced the rights of married women and widows.

7. In criminal trials across the country, there had been numerous convictions for rape and sexual assault against minors. Meanwhile, as part of efforts to combat violence against girls and women, an agreement had been signed in March 2018 between her own ministry, the Ministry of the Interior and Decentralization, the Ministry of Post, Telecommunications and the Digital Economy and various telephone companies to set up a free nationwide telephone hotline to enable victims and witnesses to report incidents of gender-based violence anonymously and safely.

8. In an effort to increase women's financial independence, an extensive programme had been launched to achieve self-sufficiency in basic food products. The programme was an ambitious one and would involve all sectors of society and women in particular, given their predominance in agriculture and in the processing and sale of agricultural and fishery products. Her own ministry had launched a nationwide awareness-raising campaign to encourage women to set up cooperatives to take part in the programme. In addition, new legislation regulating land use and acquisition contained a special provision acknowledging women's right of access to land and nullifying all customs or traditions that restricted that right. Support for women's income-generating activities was provided by the Government and development partners, in the form of farm tools and safety equipment such as life vests.

9. All the Government's initiatives for women were carried out in the framework of the 2018–2022 human rights-based National Development Plan and of the 2017–2021 National Gender Policy, both of which incorporated the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. They had been made possible thanks to the return of peace to the country, and notably in the department of Pool, with the signing of the cessation of hostilities and ceasefire agreement in December 2017 between the Government and the forces of Pastor Ntoumi. A national plan of action for the implementation of Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) had been adopted in May 2018.

Articles 1 to 6

10. **Ms. Schulz** said that the Committee was aware of the problems facing the State party, particularly those resulting from the recent conflict in the department of Pool. It nevertheless found the lack of implementation, or delays in implementation, of its previous recommendations regrettable. The information in the State party's report was incomplete and the common core document, which dated from 1996, did not reflect the many changes that had taken place since then.

11. Despite the fact that 36 years had passed since the State party had ratified the Convention, and notwithstanding the overhaul of its legislation that had been in progress for several years, many laws, some of them dating from colonial times, continued to discriminate against women, among other things undermining efforts to increase women's autonomy. She would like to know why the draft legislation submitted to the Ministry of Justice more than two years previously had still not been adopted. Would they be validated and published by December 2018, as stated in the State party's written replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/COG/Q/7/Add.1), and if so, what training was envisaged to enable judicial and court officials to take due cognizance of the new provisions?

12. She would like to know why the State party had still not incorporated into its legislation provisions reflecting the definition of discrimination contained in article 1 of the Convention, despite the stipulation in the preamble to the Constitution to the effect that the fundamental principles contained in international human rights instruments were an integral part of the Constitution.

13. The United Nations Treaty Collection database contained no indication that the Congo had ratified the Optional Protocol to the Convention, or that it had accepted the amendment to article 20 (1) of the Convention, despite the statements in paragraphs 131 and 132 of the State party's report. She wondered whether the problem was a delay in depositing the relevant instruments or the fact that the decisions had not yet been taken.

14. She would like to know what percentage of women had been informed of their rights as a result of the measures described in the State party's report. Noting that geographical factors made courts inaccessible to many women, she said that she would like to know how much of the country was still not served by the official court system. Specifically, it would be interesting to learn whether there were any arrangements in place for mobile courts to hold hearings in local communities and, if so, what percentage of the female population in those communities attended the hearings. She would like to know how far the State party had gone in doing away with traditional courts, which were the only kind of court many women had access to, geographically, financially or culturally.

15. Courts were expensive and the vast majority of women were poor. She would like to know when free legal aid would be instituted and whether judicial fees were likely to be

reduced in order to make the courts accessible to the poorest members of the population, including women. It would be useful to hear about any measures in place to combat corruption in the judicial system, which was another factor that discouraged women from bringing proceedings.

16. Many violations of women's rights were caused by the existence of a parallel system of State law and customary law. She would like to know what measures were in place to ensure that women who applied to the traditional courts, for example to settle family disputes, received equal treatment as guaranteed under the Convention. Could the judgments of traditional courts be appealed in the State courts?

17. **Mr. Tsiba Egombo** (Congo) said that the legislative review had been completed and would shortly be considered by Parliament. The revised legislation contained a definition of discrimination that was in line with the Committee's recommendations. The Optional Protocol had indeed been ratified but there had been a delay in depositing the relevant instrument.

18. Access to justice was one of the areas covered by the legislation under review, although no distinction was made between men and women. Court fees were not set by law and indeed court proceedings were free of charge; what was expensive were lawyers and other professionals involved in the proceedings. Efforts were being made to reduce such costs.

19. There was legislative provision for mobile courts, which held hearings regularly in all departments. However, the dearth of resources caused by the current crisis had made it difficult to maintain them. As for the status of the judgments of customary courts, where a party cited such a judgment in an ordinary court, there was no legal obstacle preventing its being taken into account. However, the decision to do so was made on a case-by-case basis and at the court's discretion.

20. **Ms. Mbemba Talansi** (Congo) said that some of the legal codes, in particular the Personal and Family Code, had required extensive revision; that was the reason for the delayed adoption of the codes. A training programme had been set up, in partnership with the French National School of the Judiciary, to upgrade the skills of legal personnel in various areas, such as issues specific to children or women, in order to help them apply the codes. The next training session was under preparation and targeted not only judges, but also prison administration personnel. The codes prohibited all forms of discrimination against women. In the Congo, the law treated women and men generally on an equal footing, but provided a greater degree of protection for women and women's rights.

21. The Congolese courts held mobile court hearings as required. Such hearings, although they demanded considerable resources, were particularly valuable in making justice accessible to indigenous peoples. While filing proceedings was free in the Congo, justice system personnel — bailiffs, lawyers and notaries — had to be paid. The Government was at present considering ways of reducing the cost of employing such professionals. The legal system in the Congo was going through a period of ground-up reform, and the Supreme Judicial Council was overseeing the introduction of a code of ethics that would help eliminate corruption among magistrates, law clerks and other legal personnel.

22. Customary law decisions did not have force of law in the Congo, but they were taken into account by the Congolese legal system. Persons coming before the national courts who had previously been before the traditional courts could submit the records of the traditional court hearing to the national court, where it would be given the same weight as the report of a preliminary inquiry.

23. **Ms. Schulz** said that it was not clear that the revision of the various codes was considered as a priority by the Government, as it had been ongoing for many years and had yet to be concluded. The Personal and Family Code urgently needed to be adopted, to remove some of the worst forms of discrimination still present in the national legislation. Noting the delegation's affirmation that the codes included the definition of discrimination against women as it figured in article 1 of the Convention, she said the Committee was nevertheless concerned that the bicameral Parliament might seek to reopen discussion of

the texts of the codes and adopt alternate wording. The recently developed code of ethics that had been drafted was no doubt useful, but additional practical and visible measures were needed to combat corruption.

24. She would be grateful for information concerning measures taken to uphold the rights of women fighting to keep their lands and to protect them from violence carried out directly or indirectly by companies to force them to leave. It would be useful to know what measures had been taken to correct the environmental damage caused by industry. What compensation was awarded to women landowners when the State granted a license for industrial development on lands traditionally used for farming? How many trials had taken place, respectively, following land evictions and following attacks made against women defending the rights of farming populations?

25. **Ms. Verges** said that she would appreciate more detailed information on the reasons for the delay in the adoption of the codes and on whether, during the consultation process, all stakeholders had been involved, including religious representatives. It would be interesting to learn what measures the Government had taken to rectify the judiciary's lack of independence.

26. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo) said that the Congo, like a number of Central African countries, was a new democracy and was standing at a crossroads: a fully developed democratic system could not be put in place instantly, but progress was being made towards that goal and there was political will to do so eventually. In the department of Pool, the women of the Congo had actively implemented Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) on women and peace and security, by playing a major role in the achievement of a peaceful solution to the conflict and in the maintenance of the ceasefire. Women had supported the new Constitution, in which they saw their interests reflected. In particular, the law on parity and the establishment of the Women's Advisory Council had garnered their support.

27. A free helpline had been put in place to allow victims of violence to call for immediate assistance. Certain unsatisfactory convictions in cases involving violence against women had been reviewed, upon the order of the Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development; the resulting revised decisions had been deemed satisfactory by the victims. In addition, the law on landownership had been revised to allow women access to property and to inherit land from their husbands throughout the national territory. The delayed adoption of the revised Personal and Family Code had arisen from the fact that 70 per cent of women in the country were married according to traditional custom rather than under State law and it was important that the law should cover all women. Many stakeholders had taken part in the reformulation of the codes, including religious representatives, women's rights associations and others. The inheritance rights of women who had married under a dowry arrangement, or who were not officially married, would now be guaranteed in the Congo.

28. **Ms. Ameline**, noting the adoption of a new plan for implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) for 2018–2024 in the department of Pool, asked what governance framework had been established for the plan. Given the near impossibility for humanitarian organizations to enter the region and bring aid, she said she would like to know what emergency measures had been taken in respect of the 13,000 displaced persons in the region and in respect of the humanitarian crisis, more generally, and what resources had been made available to support those efforts. She would appreciate clarification regarding the institutional framework to support the Women's Advisory Council and the strategy adopted under the National Development Plan for the period 2018–2022. Additional information on the budgetary resources allocated to those initiatives, the training on women's rights envisaged for public officials, and the financial priority given to promoting women's rights by the Government would also be welcome. In 2013, the State party had committed to establishing a gender-responsive budget. Despite the economic crisis in the country, it was essential to adopt a holistic approach, associating the Sustainable Development Goals with the objectives of the Convention in order to take full advantage of the leadership that could be provided by women. She would like to know whether the Committee's concluding observations would be discussed in Parliament, what visibility they would be given and what strategy would be applied to raise the awareness of Parliament regarding the Convention and thus promote its implementation.

29. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that despite the provision under national legislation for increased quotas of women in public office, the 2017 elections had resulted in only a very modest rise in the number of elected women representatives. She would like to know if the State party planned to introduce temporary special measures to increase opportunities for women to be elected to public office and, more generally, to achieve equality in areas where women were underrepresented and subjected to discrimination.

30. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that in parallel to the drafting of the new codes now before Parliament, preparatory and advocacy work regarding the texts had been carried out with parliamentarians. It was therefore not anticipated that they would be extensively debated by the two houses. On the question of expropriation of women from their lands, the State had established a compensation procedure. In the case of the women expelled from the market garden belt in Brazzaville, the State had provided expropriated persons with new land. There were a number of associations defending the rights of women landholders in the Congo; they received the support of the Government.

31. The Supreme Judicial Council had taken action to ensure the independence of the judiciary, including by sanctioning judges guilty of corruption, in seven cases removing them from their functions.

32. Access by humanitarian organizations to the department of Pool during the armed conflict had been restricted for safety-related reasons. Now they were all present on the ground and, following the signature of the Cessation of Hostilities and Ceasefire Agreement, displaced persons were returning to their communities, where the Government and its development partners were helping them to rebuild their lives. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women was implementing and promoting Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) in the region.

33. With regard to according financial priority to the promotion of women's rights, the Government had formulated a human rights-based national development programme, and allocated it a budget, despite the crisis. The second-generation national gender policy and the related action plan (2017–2021) also provided impetus for women's rights in all sectors. The country had not yet achieved the objective of introducing gender-responsive budgeting, which necessitated training all ministerial planning directors in such budgeting. Gender focal points had however been appointed in all the ministries.

34. Temporary special measures in the Congo were focused on raising women's awareness of opportunities for election to office. Campaigns were organized each time an election was to be held to encourage more women to run. The Women's Advisory Council would continue to promote the objective of parity in the country.

35. **Ms. Ameline** said that it was of utmost importance for the State party to accelerate the promotion of women's rights by coordinating efforts made under the Convention, the resolutions on women and peace and security and the Sustainable Development Goals. A well-funded strategy with clear goals was required to ensure that women played a role in the economic and social transformation of country.

36. **Ms. Verges** said that temporary special measures were a vital tool in all sectors in which women were underrepresented, and not just in electoral quotas. The training of gender focal points should be a priority to enable them to safeguard women's rights effectively.

37. **Ms. Schulz** said that it was not sufficient to have provisions establishing quotas for electoral lists. Political parties might, for example, place women candidates further down the list, thereby spoiling their chances of election. Practical measures, such as the targeted recruitment of women and the provision of continuous training throughout their careers, were required to ensure gender parity in the public sector.

38. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo) said that the principle of parity between men and women was enshrined in article 17 of the Constitution and it was for the law to ensure that parity was reached in practice. A draft law on parity, which had drawn inspiration from laws in other countries, was currently under consideration by the Council of Ministers and, if approved, would subsequently be brought before Parliament. Moreover, a government action plan had been proposed to achieve parity by 2030 and an awareness campaign would be launched in

2019 to persuade all stakeholders, particularly those with traditional viewpoints, of the merits of parity in terms of the country's development. The Electoral Act of 2014 guaranteed that 30 per cent of candidates on electoral lists were women. However, that did not translate into 30 per cent of elected representatives being women. The Government was aware of that shortcoming and would seek to remedy it in the next review of the Act.

39. **Mr. Tsiba Egombo** (Congo) said that the Women's Advisory Council had been established under the 2015 Constitution. It was comprised entirely of women and its purpose was to advise the President on matters pertaining to women's rights and make recommendations to the Government to promote the inclusion of women in development.

40. **Ms. Kodia** (Congo) said that, since the ceasefire agreement in December 2017, almost all displaced populations of the department of Pool had returned home. The focus of aid efforts by the Government and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) had thus shifted from disarmament and demobilization towards the reintegration of the previously displaced populations into society. No-go areas no longer existed. The Government had assisted the World Food Programme in setting up school canteens in towns and villages across 13 districts in the Pool region. The destroyed homes of displaced persons were being rebuilt and persons in need had been provided with temporary accommodation in tents by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

41. **Ms. Schulz** said that the most effective penalty for violations of the quota of women on electoral lists was to declare the result null and void. Other countries with quotas on their electoral lists had the policy of alternating the names of men and women. She was concerned that having an all-female Women's Advisory Council might run counter to its intended goals by lending credence to the idea that women's issues lay solely in women's hands.

42. **Ms. Ameline** said that, while the progress made since the ceasefire was welcome, a careful assessment of the rights violations and violence during the conflict was required.

43. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo) said that the first two thirds of the electoral lists alternated the names of men and women, which in part explained the increase in the representation of women after the most recent elections.

44. **Ms. Kodia** (Congo) said that the assessment of women victims of violence was conducted as part of the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration programme. While there had been many cases of psychological violence, no reports had been received of physical violence over the two years in which the programme had been running. Clinics offering counselling services had been set up to treat victims of psychological violence.

45. **Ms. Rana**, noting that many of the awareness-raising campaigns mentioned in the replies to the list of issues (CEDAW/C/COG/Q/7/Add.1, para. 38) were annual day events, said that she wished to know whether an assessment had been conducted of the impact of the country's awareness-raising programmes on societal change. Given the persistence of harmful traditional practices and stereotypes against women and girls, she would be interested to hear whether the State party had considered introducing sustained and institutionalized awareness-raising programmes across all government entities, and how civil society might be engaged in them.

46. Domestic violence continued to be a widespread problem, exacerbated by the absence of a comprehensive law and adequate penalties. Noting that the draft comprehensive strategy to address gender-based violence had been completed in 2017, she wondered what had delayed the implementation of the strategy for almost a year. She would appreciate assurances that the implementation of the strategy would indeed begin by the end of the year. Furthermore, it would be helpful to have a clear timeline of the adoption of the draft law on gender violence, which covered sexual harassment, forced and levirate marriages and female genital mutilation. Since there was no clear structure or mechanism for the collection of gender-disaggregated data on the care of victims, she wished to hear about the State party's plans to improve data collection and the entity that would be responsible for gathering and disseminating the data. Regarding care centres for women victims of violence in hospitals, she would appreciate information as to how many such centres had been established and what kind of services were provided. In view of the

high rates of violence, she asked whether there were any long-term shelters and, if not, whether the Government would consider establishing such shelters.

47. **Ms. Verges** said that she would appreciate a time frame for the adoption of a bill on trafficking in persons, which had been initially approved in July 2013. She wondered whether the bill took into account the study on human trafficking that had been conducted in the same year and the law provisions in place to prevent, suppress and punish trafficking in persons in accordance with international instruments. In terms of the activities undertaken in conjunction with civil society organizations to combat prostitution, she would welcome an explanation of the support offered by the Government to women and girls who sought to leave prostitution. Although the State party had acceded to an array of regional and international instruments to combat trafficking, those instruments had not been properly implemented. She thus wished to know what measures the State party was adopting to give full effect to those instruments. What steps had been taken towards ratifying the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime and the Protocols thereto?

48. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo) said that the prohibition on levirate marriage had been included in the review of the Family Code. Female genital mutilation was not practised in the Congo and was prohibited by law along with forced marriage. Action had been taken to raise awareness of forced marriage in remote areas, where the practice continued in violation of the law. The bill on gender violence would be enacted in 2019. A number of measures had been taken in collaboration with the Ministry of Agriculture, Livestock and Fisheries to tackle issues affecting rural women, including climate change, on the International Day of Rural Women celebrated in October.

49. **Ms. Ossey** (Congo) said that there were no limitations on access to public office. On 30 April 2018, a census had found there to be 61,195 civil servants in the country, of whom roughly half, had been women.

50. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that the National Centre for Statistics and Economic Studies was the body responsible for the collection of official government statistics, the collection of which remained a major challenge, despite the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). The recently established hotline for women victims of violence would encourage reporting and thereby help to provide a clearer idea of the scale of the problem. Plans were in place to build a rehabilitation centre for such victims, including those living with HIV/AIDS, though there were already shelters offering medical and psychological support and counselling services run by NGOs.

51. **Ms. Rana** asked how the State party ensured the implementation of national laws prohibiting harmful traditional practices, how many hospitals offered specific health-care services for such victims, what kind of services were provided and whether a comprehensive strategy to combat violence against women would be implemented by the end of 2018.

52. **Ms. Gabr** said that female genital mutilation, despite having no basis in Christianity or Islam, continued to be performed mainly in countries in the Nile Basin. The State party's authorities should raise awareness of the nature of the practice, particularly among religious leaders and persons living in rural areas.

53. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo) said that the planned rehabilitation centre for survivors of violence against women and girls, including those living with HIV/AIDS, had been inspired by the one-stop centres found in Rwanda. Provision had been made for the centre in the national budget approved by parliament. It was hoped that the centre, which would be able to provide temporary accommodation for up to two weeks, would reduce rates of gender-based violence. Organizing the longer-term accommodation and social and family reintegration of victims was a task incumbent on the Ministry of Social Affairs, Humanitarian Action and Solidarity. Psychological abuse was a cause for concern that was being prioritized by the Government, despite the difficult economic conditions in the country.

54. There were currently no plans to adopt legislation on trafficking or exploitation of prostitution. She reiterated that female genital mutilation was not a traditional practice in the Congo and was, in any case, prohibited.

Articles 7 to 9

55. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that, despite the existence of a legal framework guaranteeing their access to all areas of public life, women continued to be underrepresented in decision-making positions, especially at the highest levels. In that connection, she would be grateful for detailed information, including statistics, on the participation of women in the public and private sectors, including the judiciary. Noting that the 2006 amendment to the Political Parties Act had been seen as one of a number of measures designed to boost women's political participation, she asked what the measures had achieved and what steps had been taken to eliminate cultural barriers to women's access to certain high-level posts and to combat the sexual harassment that sometimes discouraged women's participation in political events. Further information on the national action plan for implementing Security Council resolution 1325 (2000) would also be appreciated.

56. **Ms. Gabr** said that she wished to know whether the Nationality Code had been revised to grant women equal rights with men in the transmission of their nationality to their children and foreign spouses, whether the children of Congolese women with foreign spouses faced any administrative problems and what was being done to ratify the 1954 Convention relating to the Status of Stateless Persons and the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness. She invited the delegation to comment on the access to birth registration of indigenous peoples and displaced populations and urged the State party to raise awareness of the importance of birth certificates among administrative officials and the general public.

57. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo) said that the President of the Congo had expressed a strong political will to promote and protect the rights of indigenous peoples. The Government's current focus was on raising awareness that such peoples had the same rights as other citizens, that they did not have to live in substandard conditions and that the term "*autochtone*" ("indigenous") was not in any way derogatory. The Ministry for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development held frequent events with the participation of indigenous women and, earlier that year, on the occasion of International Women's Day, had included two indigenous women in a delegation that it had sent to New York.

58. In recent years, significant progress had been made with regard to the representation of women in diplomacy. In her capacity as Minister for the Advancement of Women and the Integration of Women in Development, she was often asked by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation to provide lists of suitable women candidates for ambassadorial roles. Women were also well represented in local government councils, which were a stepping stone to more senior positions within government.

59. **Ms. Adou Ngapi** (Congo) said that the offence of sexual harassment would be taken into account in ongoing legal reforms. The National Development Plan for the period 2018–2022 provided for monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to ensure its effective implementation.

60. **Ms. Mbemba Talansi** (Congo) said that awareness-raising campaigns were under way to empower women and girls and to change traditional perceptions of their roles in society. In recent years, the number of women judges had grown steadily, in part thanks to the reopening of the Legal Service Training College. Of the five courts of appeal in the country, two were headed by women. With regard to violence against women, court officials and criminal investigation officers liaised with parastatal facilities for the provision of support to women victims of violence with the aim of guaranteeing that perpetrators were brought to justice.

61. The foreign spouses of Congolese women could be granted Congolese citizenship from the start of their sixth year of marriage, provided that they showed signs of cultural integration. Citizenship could also be obtained through a process of naturalization. Children born on Congolese soil were automatically entitled to a certificate of Congolese nationality,

regardless of their parents' nationalities. Judicial officials were expected to take steps to facilitate the access of indigenous peoples to free birth certificates.

62. **Ms. Gabr** said that she would like to know specifically whether the Nationality Code had been or would be revised to grant women equal rights with men to transmit their nationality to their children and foreign spouses. In that connection, she asked whether the foreign spouses of Congolese men could be also granted Congolese citizenship from the start of their sixth year of marriage.

63. **Ms. Verges** said that she would welcome details of the content and scope of the National Programme to Promote Women's Leadership in Political and Public Life 2017–2021. Noting that one of the shortcomings of the Electoral Act was that it did not provide for measures to ensure compliance with the 30 per cent quota for women candidates in legislative and local elections, she said it would be useful to learn what complementary steps were being taken to encourage and incentivize political parties to endorse women candidates. In any event, once adopted, the draft law on gender parity would, in her view, require a revision of the Electoral Act.

64. While it was commendable that women accounted for virtually half of all civil servants in the State party, they remained underrepresented in high-ranking positions, including in the judiciary, so continued efforts to ensure equal representation were undoubtedly needed.

65. **Ms. Nadaraia** said that she would be grateful to receive statistics on the representation of women in diplomacy and on the recent progress made in boosting it.

66. **Ms. Ingani** (Congo) said that the eventual adoption of the draft law on gender parity would almost certainly entail a revision of the Electoral Act. The Government's current focus, however, was on raising awareness among women of their potential and ability to occupy positions of responsibility on an equal footing with men.

67. **Ms. Mbemba Talansi** (Congo) said that the rules concerning the transmission of nationality to a foreign spouse were the same for Congolese women and men.

The meeting rose at 1 p.m.